



GENERAL INFORMATION FOR ORGANIZATIONS INTERESTED IN BECOMING SERVERMONT VISTA HOST SITES

AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program designed specifically to fight poverty through increasing organizational capacity. Founded as Volunteers in Service to America in 1964 and incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993, VISTA has been on the front lines in the fight against poverty in America for 50 years. VISTA members commit to serve full-time for a year at a nonprofit organization or local government agency to focus on building permanent infrastructure to help organizations more effectively bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

The SerVermont AmeriCorps VISTA Program is a statewide national service program that places VISTA members at sites that are developing programs which address poverty related issues with community based solutions. The program is housed at SerVermont within the VT Agency of Human Services. The SerVermont mission is to promote, support, and recognize volunteerism and community service throughout the State of Vermont. SerVermont receives funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service (The Corporation) to serve as the sponsor and coordinating agency for the VISTA Program.

SerVermont provides programmatic and financial oversight of the program; skill-building and personal development training for members; and training, materials, and support for both supervisors and members. SerVermont VISTA Program host sites will be located throughout Vermont and may include non-profit agencies, municipalities, schools, and state offices. SerVermont will be placing 26 VISTA members at sites, and will have a VISTA Leader to provide member support.

VISTA Program sites agree to meet standards, including the following:

- Pay a cash match for each member (\$6,000 for most sites their 1st year; \$7,000 2nd year, \$8,000 for the 3rd year)
- Comply with all relevant laws and policies
- Interview and select potential members (SerVermont must approve all members prior to offers being made)
- Ensure that members do not displace staff and do not offer VISTA member's employment at site that would disrupt their year of service
- Select a site supervisor and ensure that he or she attends all required SerVermont VISTA Program meetings
- Ensure the safety of the members
- Provide hands-on supervision of and direction to the member with a minimum requirement of a weekly one-hour meeting
- Provide the member with the tools and equipment necessary for the position including, at a minimum, a computer, dedicated work station, and access to a phone line
- Guarantee that SerVermont receives accurate and complete application materials, timesheets, reports, etc. by the corresponding deadlines
- Provide mileage reimbursement to member for service related activities
- Encourage and ensure that members attend required training sessions, and provide for additional skill-building and career development training opportunities
- Notify SerVermont VISTA Program staff of any issues or changes at site
- Maintain records and accounts for three years
- Seek out supports and perks for members (some sites provide assistance with paying rent; some offer food to members; some get movie tickets donated for members)

Every VISTA Project Host Site must fall within the **VISTA Programming Framework**:

- ❖ **Anti-Poverty Focus** - As previously noted, by law, the purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. The goal of every project must be to **help individuals and communities move out of poverty, not simply make poverty more tolerable**. The project should focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term services.
- ❖ **Community Empowerment** - Potential and current VISTA project sponsors must ensure that their project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, implementing, and evaluating the project. The project must be **responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents**, and should tap into inherent community assets, strengths, and resources.
- ❖ **Sustainable Solutions** - As originally designated in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act and reinforced in the Serve America Act, VISTA members are a **short-term resource** who serve to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. **All VISTA projects should be developed with a goal to phase-out the need for VISTA members and strengthen the ability of the project to continue without them**. VISTA projects typically last three years, occasionally longer. From the beginning of the project planning process, the sponsor and community must think about how to use the VISTA project to phase in other resources and systems to replace the VISTA resource.
- ❖ **Capacity Building** - Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach, and partnership development, VISTAs help sponsors achieve lasting solutions to poverty. In order to build capacity, **VISTAs do not perform direct service**. Direct service is defined as activities that immediately address individual clients' needs and these activities are usually focused on short term goals. Ideally, VISTAs work themselves out of a job and create systems that remain long after their service ends.

Furthermore, VISTAs are prohibited from engaging in activities that would supplant the tasks of or displace paid staff, contractors, or existing volunteers. This includes activities related to the development and management of other Corporation grants and programs.

Every **VISTA Assignment Description** must be guided by one or more of the following objectives:

1. To **expand** the **capacity** of communities to develop and sustain effective programs that address various issues related to poverty (eg. housing, economic development, education)
2. To **strengthen** the **operating systems** of programs that support individuals and families facing poverty related obstacles in their lives (e.g., build volunteer systems, design data systems, institute program documentation procedures, refine program operating systems, improve the quality of services, etc.)
3. To **increase financial** and **in-kind resources** available to programs that support individuals and families facing poverty related obstacles in their lives.
4. To **increase community participation** in programs with a special focus on meeting the needs of individuals and families facing poverty related obstacles in their lives.
5. To **increase the coordination** between poverty-focused programs and other appropriate community services.
6. To **increase community commitment** to and involvement in programs that support individuals and families facing poverty related obstacles in their lives.

Site Selection:

The process for selecting sites is as non-competitive and collaborative as possible, while also ensuring that our member slots are filled, and members are recruited in a timely manner.

SerVermont’s goal is to place VISTAs where they are most needed while considering:

1. **Capacity:** placing members at sites that have the capacity to recruit, train, and supervise members with a high level of effectiveness
2. **Geographic Distribution:** placing members throughout the state in concentrations that mirror population and poverty based need concentrations
3. **Impact:** placing members at sites where the efforts of their service will make a positive impact in the community by alleviating poverty
4. **Priority Areas:** Sites which most directly and relevantly address the current priority areas will be more likely to receive VISTA member(s). Current priority areas are listed below.
5. **Performance Milestones and Measurement:** Sites are REQUIRED to measure the impact of their VISTA member in accordance with CNCS policies. Sites which do not have the capacity to measure their member’s progress will not be granted a VISTA member. Please see <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/npm/vista> for the requirements regarding measuring the milestones. All sites will be accountable for meeting their measures, and documenting progress in the manner which VISTA **requires** for that measure. **This will require additional time to administer.**

2016-2017 SerVermont AmeriCorps VISTA Priority Areas		
Focus Area	Objective	Programming Area
Economic Opportunity	Financial Literacy	Providing financial services-related assistance to economically disadvantaged people to improve their financial literacy.
	Housing	Providing housing-related assistance to economically disadvantaged people to improve their housing situation.
	Employment	Providing employment-related assistance to economically disadvantaged people.
Healthy Futures	Obesity and Food Resources	Providing services to individuals in underserved communities to gain access to food resources
	Access to Health Care	Providing services to individuals in underserved community to gain access to preventative and primary health care services.
Veterans & Military Families	Veterans Served	Providing services to low-income veterans, veterans’ family members, family members of active duty military, and military service members.
Education	School Readiness	Providing services for children living in poverty to make gains in school readiness in terms of social and/or emotional development, in terms of literacy skills, and in terms of numeracy (math) skills.
	K-12 Success	Providing services to students living in poverty to improve academic performance and engagement.
	Post-Secondary Success	Providing services to students living in poverty to increase enrollment in a post-secondary institution, or to receive a vocational or technical certificate.

There is a multi-step application process.: Interested sites (both new and returning) **must send a brief letter of intent to SerVermont by February 3 , 2016** that includes the number of VISTAs you would like to request, the geographic area that will be served by the VISTA, and the focus area and objective(s) the project will address. If the site application is approved, sites will be asked to complete the VISTA Assignment Description (VAD) and a recruitment form with a brief description of the service for online posting. The VAD is a list of tasks that the member will fulfill during the year term and a collection of performance milestones that will be set for the project. After a VAD is approved, sites may begin recruiting. **If the deadline**

to start members is nearing and a site has been unsuccessful at recruiting a qualified applicant, sites from the waitlist may also be invited to begin recruiting.

Member Selection Process for 2016-2017

The start of the SerVermont VISTA Program year is in early August. For the 2016-2017 program year, **all host sites must be identified by March and members will begin sometime in August. Members must be identified by June 17.** It is very important for sites to actively engage in the interview process and return information regarding potential members to SerVermont in a timely fashion.

SerVermont will follow up with all applicants on the web-based AmeriCorps portal to request resumes and cover letters from online applicants and send them to the host sites for vetting and interviewing. SerVermont will only interview members once a host site has already done so, and once the host site has informed SerVermont that they are interested in an applicant. At that point SerVermont will interview the applicant in order to assess their fit with the VISTA Program. Host Sites which do not demonstrate that they are actively recruiting members (following up with applications, promoting their position locally, interviewing applicants, communicating with SerVermont during the process) **will not** have a member placed at their site. **SerVermont is unable to guarantee that a site will have a member placed with them.** It is essential that all host sites have the capacity to engage in a comprehensive and active search for their VISTA member.

AmeriCorps VISTA Member Details

- Members are provided with a small living allowance (members in VT received \$973/month except in Chittenden and Franklin Counties where the rate is \$1,108/month). Federal taxes are withheld each pay period.
- After a year of service members receive an education award of \$5,775 to put towards loans or future schooling **OR** a \$1,500 cash stipend. Both end-of-service options are taxed.
- Currently, VISTA members receive health coverage through Seven Corners. This coverage is **NOT** compliant with the Affordable Care Act and members are being encouraged to explore alternatives such as staying on their parents' insurance if possible, or applying for Medicaid. We expect more updates on this ongoing situation soon.
- VISTAs receive 10 personal days, 10 sick days, and may take off on federal holidays if their site is closed.
- Members may qualify for student loan forbearance during their service term. Interest accrued on qualifying loans is paid by the National Service Trust.
- If members relocate more than 50 miles to serve, the Corporation will provide relocation assistance up to \$1,000 for mileage (at 33 cents per mile) and a \$550 **allowance** to assist with relocation costs.
- Childcare subsidies are available through the Corporation for qualifying members.
- For one year after service, members may apply for federal jobs without competing against the general public (if they meet basic requirements for the job).
- Members must attend monthly SerVermont VISTA Trainings and participate in other statewide events such as the AmeriCorps launch in September and Martin Luther King Day of Service.
- Members are **NOT** allowed to work an additional job or accept any additional cash compensation. They can receive rental assistance paid directly to the landlord or gift cards.
- Members may not be involved in any religious instruction or proselytizing, or partisan political activities including voter registration drives, driving voters to the polls, or lobbying as part of their service.

Questions? Contact: Robyn Baylor
SerVermont VISTA Program Supervisor
robyn.baylor@vermont.gov
(802) 760 - 8208